# DOCTRINE OF THE PRIESTHOOD

*Let Virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy Confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and the Doctrine of the Priesthood shall Distil upon thy soul as the Dews from Heaven. (D & C 121:45)*

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## PATRIARCH BENJAMIN F. JOHNSON'S LETTER TO ELDER GEORGE F. GIBBS

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*JOHNSON TELLS OF HIS CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH THE PROPHET JOSEPH SMITH*


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# Introduction

This issue focuses on the experiences and events which came under the personal observation of Benjamin F. Johnson, who was an early convert to the Church and a close associate of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Johnson's association with the Prophet commenced early in the Kirtland Period when he was a boy, and continued until the Prophet's death in 1844.

During the early Nauvoo period, when the Prophet Joseph became sick with malaria, Johnson became his nurse, and then later when Johnson became sick, the Prophet returned this kindness, by personally looking after him.

After returning from a mission, the Prophet taught Johnson the principle of Plural Marriage, and asked for several of his sisters to be his wives. Hence, Johnson became the Prophet's brother-in-law and ultimately his business partner, with power of attorney to sign the Prophet's name.

Later, when the Prophet organized the Council of Fifty, Johnson was made a member and instructed privately regarding the doctrine of the Kingdom. The Prophet prophesied that Johnson would live to be hoary with age, and that he would be led by the Spirit of God to convey certain teachings and keys regarding the Kingdom of God to some chosen individual. This prophecy was literally fulfilled for Johnson outlived all the original members of the Council, and as such became head over the Kingdom. In this capacity Johnson appointed the Prophet Joseph Smith's Birthright Heir among the posterity of one of his sisters, who according to law were the Prophet Joseph Smith's through the New and Everlasting Covenant of Marriage. This Johnson did because Emma and her children had apostatized and thus forfeited their right to the Birthright over the Kingdom. This last act of Johnson's, which he finalized in 1903, has been the cause of considerable controversy. And it is this act which is destined to make Johnson's life and writings so critically important to those of us in our day who would take the belief and practice of the whole doctrine of the restoration seriously.

**Letter of Explanation**
**Written by Charles S. Sellers**

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*An Interesting Letter from*
*Patriarch Benjamin F. Johnson to*
*Elder George F. Gibbs*

The accompanying manuscript was written between April 1903, and the following October. In the early part of that year Elder Gibbs, through the recommendation of the First Presidency of the Church, applied to Father Johnson, for a written statement of his personal knowledge of incidents and facts that came under his observation, from the almost earliest history of the Church. (Brother Johnson joined the Church in 1833 when but 15 years of age.) Also the conclusions of his mind on various subjects, that the large experience and the long and eventful career of this remarkable man, could not but give weight to, as relating to the faith of the Latter Day Saints. Brother Johnson promptly undertook the great task of complying to the best of his judgment and ability, and wrote the following long

letter. During the writing of this manuscript Brother Johnson passed his 85th birthday, being 85 years old on the 28 of July 1903. (His death occurred on November 18, 1905, at Mesa, Arizona, where he had resided for many years.)

A copy of this manuscript was sent Brother Gibbs and the original was nearly lost sight of for a few years, but about three years ago it came into my hands. About two years ago the copy sent Brother Gibbs was destroyed by the burning of his house, which left only the original which I had. This, previous to coming into my possession had been considerably injured by mice — about half of each of the last two pages, including the initial letter "B", from the signature "B. F. Johnson", had been eaten away. Also the page proceeding the last two, commencing with this general subject heading: "What I Know of the Objects and [Purposes in Raising the Mormon Battalion", was somewhat injured. By comparison with other parts of the manuscript on some of the subject matter treated upon in the last part, the advantage I had of having read the manuscript over with Brother Johnson when it was written, and recollections of talks with him, I undertook to re-write the missing part; and feel that the reproduction is almost just as he had originally written it. This re-written part will be found accompanying the manuscript.

A considerable part of this manuscript will be found hard to decipher. I have made a copy of [the] same upon which [I] put much time and study. Have divided more into sentences and paragraphs, which brings the meaning out plainer. Also in a number of cases [I have] inserted words in brackets (in the copy), that seemed to bring the meaning out more clearly or seemed necessary to further explain. Brother Gibbs also has a duplicate of the copy I have made.

*C[harles] S. Sellers*
*Mesa, Arizona*
*July 1, 1911*

# Patriarch Benjamin F. Johnson's Letter to Elder George F. Gibbs

Edited
*by*
Fred C. Collier

*Elder George F. Gibbs*
*Salt Lake City, Utah*
*[Between April and October, 1903]*

*Dear Brother:*

In resuming my answer to your scholarly and effusive epistle, I feel in every degree incompetent to the task. Especially do I feel the want of learning and my writings of course must betray to you my poverty in classical erudition. Through childhood and early youth my advantages even for primary education was the most meager. At [age] 17 I attended the winter term of grammar school taught by W[illia]m E. McLelland in Kirtland and presided over by the Prophet — at the same time attending night lectures on geography. These were my greatest opportunities for schooling and in them was finished my school education and if I have acquired in life anything further of worth, it has been as snatched from the way side while on the run as [a] missionary, [or] pioneer or while in nature's great laboratory with the ax, plough, spade or garden implements. I have been hard at work to provide sustenance for that flock which the

Father had sent to my especial care. And while now it may be in a degree common, even with the youth of Zion, whose advantages so far surpass their parents, to look upon the aged as "back members", "old fossils", or "moss backs", yet not one whit of that spirit do I find in your letter, and my heart goes out towards you in love and blessing as though you were indeed one of my own sons. And I most earnestly pray that the Lord will so inspire my thoughts and so waken a remembrance of the past, that I may be able to write to you as by the voice of the Spirit of my calling in the *Priesthood of the Fathers,* of anything pertaining to gospel principle or of our historic past, that may better equip you for that sphere of greater callings and responsibilities that await you as a Son of Zion in the lineage of Ephraim and of the *Seed of the Blessed.*

## MAN'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE GOSPEL

Your thoughts in regard to the need of positive keys for interpreting our true position, condition, and relation to the Gospel, both in the past and for the future strictly accord with my own. And to me it simply means that the spark of Life or of Light brought with us at birth through a cumulative experience has attained its present status in intellectual and physical power. In infancy we were fed upon milk and in childhood [we were] led by a loving hand, while our mistakes were tenderly admonished. As we became older we began to grasp the principles and issues of physical life and the modus for its sustenance through [the] labor of our hands — while the Gospel as an alphabet with its possibilities of reaching every principle of Truth and Light within the great science of Eternal Lives is given to us as spiritual or intellectual food, through which by faith we can forever grow in the Knowledge and Power of the Gods, to become in reality and fullness even the "Sons of God",[a] with Glory, Exaltation, Dominion and Eternal Progression, through the *procreation* of Endless Lives.[b]

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[a]Gen. 6:2, 4; Ex. 4:22; Deut. 32:5–10; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38;7; Psa. 82:1, 6; Isa. 43:6; 45:11; Jer. 31:9; Hos. 1:10; John 1:12; Rom. 8:14–23; 2 Cor. 6:18; Gal. 4:5–7; Phil. 2:15; Heb. 12:7–9; 1 John 3:1–3; 3 Nephi 9:17; Eth. 3:14; Mor. 7:26, 48; D&C 11:30; 34:3; 35:2; 39:4; 42:52; 45:8; 76:58; 128:23; 132:14–21; Moses 6:8, 22, 64–68; 7:1, 33; 8:13, 21[b]D&C 132:14–24; *TPJS* 322; *BYDD* 69–86

### IMPERFECTIONS OF THE SAINTS

And to how much of this greatness in Knowledge and Power have we yet attained? As well may little children in making their mud pottery claim perfection as sculptures as for us to claim a fullness in the knowledge of gospel principles, precepts or powers. When were we as a people even able fully to live by the law given to us of the Lord? In [18]31 and [3]2 we were tried in Missouri with the "Law of Consecration",[c] in which we failed.[d] In [18]33 we were given in Kirtland the "Order of Enoch"[e] and the "Word of Wisdom".[f] The "Order" of Enoch was not fully honored. And after 70 years experience in [ac]cumulating wisdom many are yet not wise. While through His mercy the Lord in [18]36 gave us, when under His rod, the "Law of Tithing"[g] in place of the former law — but how have we as a people fulfilled it? And again when in [18]43, He gave us by command the High and Holy Law of Plural Marriage[h] with the Sealing Power of the Holy Priesthood,[i] did we as a people receive it in the spirit and purpose for which it was given? Or have we been slow in comprehending even the primary lessons and precepts of this life's mission?

### CHARACTERIZATION OF JESUS AND JOSEPH

And as for even our leaders being always filled with the light of their calling, to see the "end from the beginning" or always to discern correctly the thoughts and purposes of others — [this] has not been according to my experience or knowledge. Does not the Lord tell us in [the] Doctrine [and] Covenants, Section 130 that the Holy Ghost may descend upon a man and not always remain with him?[j] And do we not all at times feel that to be a reality, as did the Master, when through mental anguish he "sweat blood at every pore",[k] as also when upon the cross he cries out in agony of soul to his Father to know "why he was forsaken?"[l] And to show a

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[c]*TPBY* 3:303, 376; D&C 42:29–42, 53–55, 70–73; 49:20; 51:1–20; 57; 58:31–44, 50–57; 70; 72; 78:3–14; 82:10–21; 83; 84:103–105; 85:1–11; 90:28–30; 92:1; 94; 103:22–23, 35–36; 104; *UPR* 9:1–7; 13:1–11; 21:1–6; 23:1–3; 74:1–2; Acts 2:44; 4:32; 3 Nephi 26:19; 4 Nephi 1:3, 24–26 [d]D&C 54; 56; 58:60; 90:35–36; 103:4; 104:4, 52; 105:3–4, 8–11 [e]*JD* 16:156 [f]D&C 89 [g]D&C 119 [h]D&C 131:1–4; 132 [i]D&C 131:5; 132:7, 18–19, 26 [j]D&C 130:23 [k]Luke 22:44 [l]Matt.

change of moods even in our Great Head, witness him in twining a rope and in anger scourging out merchants and money changers from the Temple and kicking over their tables.[m] And in a gush of resentment toward those who hated him he cries out, "Oh! You scribes, pharisees, hypocrites, ye are of your father the Devil and his works you do," calling them "garnished sepulchres full of dead men's bones", "robbers of widows and orphans and oppressors of the poor".[n] And as though he would have them fight for the Kingdom he had sent them to preach, he told those who had not swords to "sell their coat and buy one".[o] But oh! How changed in feeling when he on the cross could realize the enormity of their guilt and the greater sufferings consequent to them — and then with heart melted in pity for his murderers and them that hated him, he cried [out] to his Father with entreaty that they be forgiven.[p]

And just such phases to a degree have I witnessed in the life and character of our great Prophet, who stood in the presence of both the Father and the Son[q] and personally conversed with them both, being often visited by holy angels,[r] while continually receiving by revelation the word of the Lord to his people. And yet he was altogether of "like passions with his brethren and associates".[s] As a son he was nobility itself in love and honor of his parents. As a brother he was loving and true even unto death. As a husband and father, his devotion to wives and children stopped only at idolatry. And his life's greatest motto after "God and His Kingdom" was that of "Wives, Children and Friends". And on one Sunday morning, while sitting with him in the mansion dining room in private converse, two of Emma's children came to him as just from their mother, all so nice, bright and sweet, and calling to them my attention he said, "Benjamin, look at these children. How could I help loving their mother? If necessary I would go to Hell for such a woman." And although at the time he had in the mansion other wives [who were] younger and apparently more brilliant, yet Emma, the wife of his youth,[t] to me appeared the Queen of his heart and of his home. But to return [to] "Joseph the Prophet" — as a friend

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27:46; Mark 15:34

[m]Matt. 21:12–13; Mark 11:15–17; Luke 19:45–46; John 2:12–16 [n]Matt. 23:13–33; Luke 11:37–54; 20:45–47; John 8:32–44; Mark 12:38–44 [o]Luke 22:36; [p]Luke 23:34 [q]JSH 1:15–19 [r]JSH 2:30–49, 68–72; D&C 13; 27:5–8; 128:20–21;

he was faithful, long suffering, noble and true to that degree that . . . [those] who did love him were at times reminded that "the rod of a friend was better than the kiss of an enemy"[u] — while others who sopped[v] in his dish but bore not reproof became his enemies, and like [the] Law's, Marks, Foster, [the] Higbee's and others who hated him and conspired to his death.

As a companion, socially he was highly endowed — [he] was kind, generous, mirth loving and at times even convivial. He was partial to a well supplied table and he did not always refuse the wine that "maketh glad the heart."[w] For amusement he would sometimes wrestle with a friend, or oftener [he] would test strength with others by sitting upon the floor with feet together and [a] stick grasped between them, but he found never his match. Jokes, rebuses, matching couplets in rhymes and etc. was not uncommon. But to call for the singing of one or more of his favorite songs was more frequent [and] of those, "Wife, Children and Friends", "Battle of River Rising", "Soldier's Tear", "Soldier's Dream" and "Last Rose of Summer" were most common. And yet although so social and even convivial at times, he would allow no arrogance or undue liberties and criticism, even by his associates, was rarely acceptable and contradiction would [a]rouse in him the lion at once. For by no one of his fellows would he be superseded or disputed, and in the early days at Kirtland and elsewhere [there] was more than once [when certain individuals were], for their impudence, helped from the congregation by his foot. And at one time, at a meeting in Kirtland, for insolence to him, he soundly thrashed his brother William, who boasted himself as invincible. And while with him in such fraternal, social and sometimes convivial mood, we could not then so fully realize the greatness and majesty of his calling, which since his martyrdom has continued to magnify in our lives as the glories of this last dispensation more fully unfolds to our comprehension.

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2:1–3; 110:1–16 [s]Acts 14:15; James 5:17; Phil. 2:5–8; [t]*HC* 5:107

## SICKNESS, DEATH AND HEALING AT NAUVOO

One small incident among the many, I will relate, to show his playful, familiar, kind and loving nature toward one who to him was as a protegee or a younger brother. Soon after the Prophet's escape from Missouri and arrival at old "Commerce" (the future Nauvoo) in 1839, I was with him. The people had flocked in from the terrible exposures of the past and nearly every one was sick with intermittent or other fevers, of which many died. In this time of great sickness, poverty and death, the Prophet called his brother Don Carlos and cousin George A. Smith as missionaries to minister to and comfort the people. And there being there two young botanic medical students, Doctors Wiley and Pendleton, he called them to prescribe medicine and called me to follow and take the general oversight and care of all the sick, which for weeks I did without even one night of respite for sleep.

[In] the forepart of September, Dr. Wiley became sick unto death, which soon occurred, after which the Prophet too had a violent attack of the prevailing sickness. And as Emma was in no degree able to care for him, it wholly devolved upon me and both day and night, through a period of little less than two weeks, I was hardly absent from his room — as almost his only food was gruel and about the only treatment he would accept was a flush of the colon with warm water, perhaps tinctured slightly with capsicum and myrrh or a little soda and salt, both of which were prepared and administered by me in the room he occupied. And if any sleep came to me, it was while lying upon his bed, or while sitting in my chair.

At the termination of this sickness and fasting, he arose from his bed like a lion or as a giant refreshed with wine. He went to President Rigdon with great reproof commanding him and his house to repent and [he then] called for a skiff, crossed the river, and finding Elijah Fordham in death's struggle, he commanded him to arise, which he did at once and was made whole, as also were others by his ministrations. But I am writing at too great length. Soon after the Prophet's recovery I too came apparently nigh unto death through [a] violent attack of the fever, through[out] which my comfort was kindly looked after by the Prophet.

About the middle of October a letter came to say that my dear mother and young sister were apparently near to death in Springfield, Illinois, and were anxious for my return. And in my anxiety again to see my mother I procured quinine, which was becoming known as an antidote for fevers. And taking it in large doses, my fever soon abated and under its tonic influence I fancied I had become well, and in great joy and hope [I] hastened preparations to start for the home of my mother and kindred at Springfield. My horse was in the yard ready to mount, but I wished to take leave of the Prophet with a hope of again . . . receiving his blessing. Of the whole sum I had obtained with which to pay for the outfit and passage to England with the Twelve when they should start (to which I had been called by the June conference at Quincy) I had but one ten dollar bill left. And I thought on it — at least I would pay a tithing. So going to the Prophet, I told him I was ready to leave and reaching to him the bill I said, "as this is all I have left, I want to pay a tithe of it."

He saw I was weak in body and that my heart was sad in leaving him. So thinking to cheer and arouse me when putting the nine dollars silver in my hand he playfully knocked my hand upward, scattering the money all over the room. My heart was full of tears and my emotion must have vent. So forgetting all but the feeling that we were boy companions playing together, I sprang at and grappled him as though to teach him a lesson. But the lesson was all to me, for on making the one grand effort to throw him I found myself in strength no more than a bulrush as compared with him. And as my strength was fictitious and my real recovery but an illusion, I collapsed and fainted in his arms. He placed me in repose and did all necessary for my restoration and comfort, then gathered up the scattered money. And after a period of delay, [though] weak, trembling and desolate, yet [being] determined to start, I led my horse to the outer gate, and as I was passing through with bridle on my arm, his hand detained me and placing his hands upon my head, he seemed to pour out his soul in blessing me. He told the Lord I had been faithful to care for others, that I was now worn and sick and that on my journey I would need His care and he asked that a

special guardian might go with me from that day and stay with me through all my life.

And oh! My dear brother, how often have I seen through life the foot prints of that angel, and knew that his hand had drawn me back from death. The day after leaving Nauvoo my fever returned with all its virulence. The next day near night I was found by the Prophet's brother, William, lying helpless by the road side. And the next evening I was found by strangers (being unconscious in the road) who kindly cared for me until I could again get upon my horse to finish the journey to my mother in Springfield, where I soon arrived and remained very sick, until Apostles Young and Kimball came in January to find me apparently nigh unto death with hemorrhage of the bowels. At leaving they told me to take a mission east so soon as [I was] able to start, which I did through [the] kindness of Brother James Standing, who ([while I laid] upon my bed in a sleigh) took me 110 miles to Paris, Illinois, and turning home on bare ground, he left me in deep mud alone and near penniless — sick [and] among strangers, while borne to the earth by a burden of bashful ignorance (the long green of young manhood) but my "Angel" was always with me to open my way.

## FAILINGS OF THE PROPHET — THE GOSPEL REVEALED LINE UPON LINE —

Now you see how I have wandered from the subject of your "three keys". But you said you wanted to learn more of my history and personalities, so what I have written may serve as a glimpse of my earlier life. Now returning to the subject, shall I tell you that just the other day at quarterly conference, one of our best missionary speakers was led to say that "our gospel was revealed as a whole and was not fragmentary." And I felt to tell him that the Gospel had not only been given to us by fragments, but that of the great science of *Eternal Lives,* we have not yet received or learned more than its alphabet. And perfection here can only exist in parts or degrees.

And while the Holy Ghost may not always remain upon a man,[z] may not even a prophet, to whom it was not yet all revealed make ~~mistakes, as in~~ the baptisms for the dead and also in the Prophet's

[u]Heb. 12:7–8; Pro. 13:24; 22:15; 29:15; 27:6; Psa. 141:5 [v]John 13:26–30 [w]Psa. 104:15

sermon at the funerals of a child of Winsor [P.] Lyon, and King Follet, when he preached that children, "even *infants, would sit upon thrones with dominion,*"[aa] which was published in the *Times and Seasons*[ab] at the time, but which, like President Woodruff, I am positive he afterwards reconsidered. And those who were with him in Kirtland, Missouri and Nauvoo will remember many things in which his sanguine and prophetic hopes seemed disappointed.

The Prophet Joseph laid the foundation of our Church in a military spirit and as the Master taught his disciples, so he taught us to "sell our coats and buy swords."[ac] But never did the sword fully prevail with us, not even with the Indians. And never before were we apparently so safe from them or our outside enemies, as since the Lord through the government permitted us to be robbed of armed self protection. And even our mission martyrs have generally been murdered after a show of resistance. And are we not beginning to see that charity is the life and core of our religion and that love is the great life spring and centripetal power of the universe. And in our gospel there appears no place for hate or resentment, not even towards those who would nail us to the cross — yet neither in Kirtland, Missouri, or Nauvoo, did we fully comply with this rule. And even in Utah many were left to cherish towards our poor Lamanite brethren vindictiveness and hate. And in Missouri by Apostle Lyman Wight we were taught to "pray for our enemies",[ad] "that God would damn them" and "give us power to kill them".

And while the Three Witnesses with his [i.e. Joseph's] councillors, and many of the Apostles with their President, as also many other[s] of our leading men, had turned their "heel"[ae] against the Prophet, how could he, in such disunion and enmity, always be strong in the might of his calling? And as the "Eyes" of the Church, betrayed by those he loved, who had so often "sopped"[af] with him when there was little in the dish — under such disappointment and sorrow, may he not have been blinded even by his tears?

Jesus spent his life in teaching his disciples, and yet they did not

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[z] D&C 130:23

[aa] *HC* 4:553, 555–557; 6:316; *WJS* 109, 136, 342, 347, 369, 372 [ab] *T&S* 5(8/15/44)617 [ac] Luke 22:36 [ad] Matt. 5:44; Luke

understand him or his doctrine. And although he spent a long period after his resurrection in teaching them of the "common salvation",[ag] and although his last word to them was a command to "baptize all nations",[ah] yet Peter the chief Apostle had not yet swallowed it. And the Lord had at last to choke it down him through his vision upon the house top.[ai] And even after that Paul "withstood"[aj] his partiality for the old law.

## EVOLUTION
## — ETERNAL PROGRESSION AND FOREORDINATION —

And now of your third key — I do not feel to say much, as I fear I am writing in too great profusion and that what I have written, you will deem of little worth. But from my stand point of view, I can see that we have been in *evolution* since from before the world was, and that we were never without our agency, and never will be unless we become the Sons of Perdition[ak] — and that through our voluntary doings or our failing to do [what we should], *we foreordained or elected ourselves* to just this condition in which we were placed on Earth — and that *we are now* through our works of good or evil *foreordaining ourselves to the good or evil that awaits us in the great future*.

And I see that only through darkness do we comprehend the light,[al] and that by their opposites do we comprehend the attributes and exaltation of the Gods. And just as we now love and care for our little children, and foresee affects to them from causes, and have a purpose beyond their comprehension for their good — just so our Father has a purpose in everything relating to our condition here, for we are not here by accident or mistake and that "all things must work to the good of those who fear God"[am] and evolute in the "upward and onward". And so I will leave your third key.

## OTHER TEACHINGS OF THE PROPHET

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6:27, 35; 3 Nephi 12:44 [ae]*HC* 5:412; 7:233; [af]John 13:26–30
[ag]Matt. 22:2–10; D&C 137:1–10; 138:1–37 [ah]Matt. 28:19; Mark 13:10; Luke 24:47 [ai]Acts 10:9–16 [aj]Gal 2:11–14 [ak]John 17:12; Phil. 1:28; 2 Thes. 2:3; 1 Tim. 6:9; Heb. 10:39; 2 Peter 3:7; Rev. 17:8, 11; 3 Nephi 27:32; 29:7; D&C 76:26, 32,

And then you would have further "Truths" from the "Teachings of the Prophet" — and where shall I commence and how shall I write to your understanding even the little I may have retained in memory?

You will not forget that the march in science through the last seventy years has in many things reversed the world's thought, changed its modus and almost its face and is fast exploding the dogmas of outside theology. Well, the keys to all this knowledge was first committed to the Prophet Joseph as a part of the Gospel for the world's benefit, for all of which he was derided.

He was the first in this age to teach "substantialism" [or] the *eternity of matter* — that no part or particle of the great universe could become annihilated or destroyed[an] — that *Light* and *Life* and *Spirit are one*[ao] — that all *Light* and *Heat* are the "Glory of God, which is His Power" that fills [the] "immensity of space" and is the *Life of all things,* and permeates with latent life and heat every particle of which all worlds are composed[ap] — that *Light* or *Spirit* and *Matter* are *the two first great primary principles of the Universe or of being*[aq] — that they are *self existent, coexistent* and indestructible and eternal[ar] — and *from these two* elements *both our spirits*[as] *and our bodies were formulated*. And he gave us to understand that there were twelve kingdoms or planets revolving around our solar system, to which the Lord gave an equal division of his time or ministry,[at] and that now was his time to again visit the Earth. He taught that all systems of worlds were in revolution, *the lesser around the greater.*[au] He taught that all the animal kingdoms would be resurrected and made us understand that they would remain in the dominion of those who, with creative power, reach out for dominion through the Power of Eternal Lives. He taught us that the Saints would fill the great west and through Mexico, Central and South America we would do a great work for the redemption of the remnants of Jacob.[av]

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43; Moses 5:24 [al]2 Nephi 2:11–27 [am]Rom. 8:28
[an]*TPJS* 301, 350–352; WJS 9, 22, 37, 203, 359, 345 [ao]*see Doctrine of the Priesthood* Vol. 5, No. 4, p. 3–18 [ap]D&C 84:45–46; 88:6–13, 41–50; 93:2–3, 9–11 [aq]D&C 93:33, 35, 23, 29; Abraham 3:18 [ar]*TPJS* 350–355 [as]Moses 3:4–5; D&C 29:31–32; 132:19–24, 30; WJS 232, 173, 269, 341; William Clayton Diary, May 16th, 1843 [at]D&C 88:51–63 [au]Abraham

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD
## AND
## — THE REVELATION OF IT'S DOCTRINE —
## THE LAST CHARGE

Of what he taught us relating to the *Kingdom of God* as it would become organized upon the Earth, through all nations "learning war no more"[aw] and all adopting the God-given Constitution of the United States as a palladium of liberty and equal rights — but this of itself would require a long chapter, which must wait until the fulfillment of a *prediction by the Prophet,* relating to *a "testimony that I should bear* after I had become hoary with age of things which he that day taught to the circle of his friends then around him," of whom I am the only one now living. So here I will leave this subject for your further interrogations and proceed to give you, so far as I can remember, the Prophet Joseph's last charge to the Quorum of Twelve Apostles.

It was at Nauvoo, early in 1844, in an assembly room common to the meeting of a Council or select circle of the Prophet's most trusted friends, including all the Twelve[.] But not all of the constituted authorities of the Church [were present], for Presidents Rigdon [and] Law or Marks [and] the High Council . . . were not members of that Council (which at times would exceed fifty in number) — nor [were the] President[s] of [other] quorums. Its sittings were always strictly private, and all its rules were carefully and promptly observed. And although its meetings at times were oftener than monthly, and my home at Ramus over 20 miles distant, [still] I was present at every session, and being about the youngest member of that Council I was deeply impressed with all that transpired, or was taught by the Prophet.

## THE PROPHET'S PREMONITION OF DEATH

Criticism had already commenced by those near to him in authority, with regard to his teachings and his doings. And we began now in ~~a degree to un~~derstand the meaning of what he had so often pub-

3:17 [av]*TPJS* 362–363; *WJS* 362–365; Journal of Amasa Lyman Hancock, Typescript, UHS

licly said, "that should he teach and practice the principles that the Lord had revealed to him, and now required of him, that those then nearest him in the stand would become his enemies and the first to seek his life", which they soon did just as he had foretold. And to show you that under conditions then existing, that the Prophet did not really desire longer to live, and that you may see how my mind was in a degree prepared for after results, I will briefly relate an incident that occurred at his last visit to us at Ramus.

After he had at evening preached with great animation to a large congregation and had blessed 19 children he turned to me and said, "Benjamin I am tired, let us go home," which only [being] a block distant, we soon reached. And entering we found a warm fire with a large chair in front, and my wife sitting near with her babe, our eldest, upon her lap. And approaching her I said, "Now Melissa, see what we have lost by your not going to meeting. Brother Joseph has blessed all the children in the place but ours and it is left out in the cold". But the Prophet at once said, "you shall loose nothing" and proceeded to bless our first son. And then with a deep drawn breath and sigh of weariness he sank down heavily in his chair and said, "Oh! I do get so tired and weary that at times I almost yearn for my rest." And then [he] proceeded briefly to recount to us some of the most stiring events of his life's labors, sufferings and sacrifices. And then he said, "I am getting tired and would like to go to my rest."

His words and tone thrilled and shocked me, and like an arrow pierced my hopes that he would long remain with us. And I said as with a heart full of tears, "Oh! Joseph, what could we as a people do without you, and what would become of the great latter day work if you should leave us?" He saw, and was touched by my emotion [and] in reply he said, "Benjamin, I should not be far away from you, and if on the other side of the Veil, I should still be working with you, and with a power greatly increased to roll on this Kingdom." And such was the tone, earnestness and pathos of his words to me then that they can never be fully recalled but with emotion.

And now before fully returning to the Council and subject, in

connection with the above, I will relate a dream told to us in council by the Prophet but a short time before his death, which was as follows: "I dreamed that by the Law's, Marks, [the] Higbee's and Foster I was bound both hand and foot and cast into a deep well. Soon after which I heard screams of terror and cries of 'Oh! Brother Joseph save [us], save us.' This cry continued until with my elbows and toes I had worked my way to the top. And looking out I saw all of those who had bound me within the folds of a terrible serpent that was preparing to swallow them, and I told them that as they had bound me, I could render them no assistance."[ax] This dream made upon my mind an impression never forgotten. And just as he related it, so it was fulfilled in his death, for those were the men that opened the way for his assassination.

## THE LAST CHARGE TO THE COUNCIL OF FIFTY

And now returning to the Council [of Fifty] and the "Last Charge", let us remember that by revelation he had reorganized the Holy Priesthood, and by command of the Lord (D&C Sec. 124:124) had taken from the First Presidency his brother Hyrum, to hold as Patriarch *the Sealing Power,* [which is] the *First and Highest honor due to Priesthood* — that he had turned the Keys of Endowments to the last Anointing and Sealing, together with [the] Keys of Salvation for the Dead, with the Eternity of the Marriage Covenant and the Power of Endless Lives — all these Keys he held and under these then existing conditions, he stood before that association of his select friends *including* all the Twelve and with great feeling and animation he graphically reviewed his life of persecution, labor and sacrifice for the Church and Kingdom of God, both of which he declared were now organized upon the earth, the burden of which had become too great for him longer to carry — that he was weary and tired with the weight he so long had borne, and he then said with great vehemence, "and in the name of the Lord I now shake from my shoulders the responsibilities of bearing off the Kingdom of God to all the world and here and now I place that responsibility

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[aw] Isa. 2:4

with all the *Keys, Powers and Privilege[s]* pertaining thereto upon the shoulders of you the Twelve Apostles ***in connection with this Council*** [i.e. the Council of Fifty]. And if you will accept this to do it, God shall bless you mightily, and shall open your way, and if you do it not you will be damned. I am henceforth free from this responsibility and I now shake my garments clean and free from the blood of this generation and of all men, and shaking his shirt with great vehemence he raised himself from the floor, while the spirit that accompanied his word thrilled every heart as with a feeling that boded bereavement and sorrow.

### The Prophet's Appointment to Benjamin F. Johnson

And now my dear brother after 60 years have passed, at 85 in age, I bear to you and to all the world a solemn testimony of the truth and verity of what I have written above, for although so many years have intervened, they are still in my mind as fresh as when they occurred, no doubt as a part fulfillment of *a prediction by the Prophet relating to "testimonies I should bear* of his teachings *after I had become* ***hoary with age****."*

There were dear Brother *other teachings* to that Council *of which I am not at full liberty to write*. But if I had your ear, I would remember that the Prophet once said to me, "Benjamin, in regard to those things I have taught you privately that are not yet for the public, *I give you the right, when you are so led to* ***commit*** *them to others,* for you will not be led wrong in discerning those worthy of your confidence."

### The Early Practice of Plural Marriage

And now to your question, "How early did the Prophet Joseph practice polygamy?" I hardly know how wisely to reply, for the truth at times may be better withheld. But as what I am writing is to be published only under strict scrutiny of the wisest, I will say that the revelation to the Church at Nauvoo [dated] July 12th, 1843, on the Eternity of the Marriage Covenant and Law of Plural Marriage [i.e. D&C 132], was not the first revelation of that law [which was] received and practiced by the Prophet. In 1835 at Kirtland I learned

from my sister's husband, Lyman R. Shirman, who was close to the Prophet and received it from him, "that the *Ancient Order of Plural Marriage was again to be practiced* by the Church." This at the time did not impress my mind deeply, although there then lived with his family a neighbor's daughter, *Fanny Alger,* a very nice and comely young woman about my own age, towards whom not only myself but everyone seemed partial for the amiability of her character. And it was whispered even then that Joseph loved her. After this there was some trouble with Jared Carter, and through Brother Shirman I learned that "as he had built himself a new house, he now wanted another wife which Joseph would not permit." And then there was some trouble with Oliver Cowdery, and whisper said it was relating to a girl then living in his family. And I was afterwards told by Warren Parrish that he himself and Oliver Cowdery did know that Joseph had Fanny Alger as a wife for they were spied upon and found together. And I can now see that as at Nauvoo, so at Kirtland — that the suspicion or knowledge of the Prophet's plural relation was one of the causes of apostasy and disruption at Kirtland, although at the time there was little said publicly upon the subject. Soon after the Prophet[']s flight in [the] winter of [18]37 & 38 the Alger family left for the west and stopping in Indiana for a time, Fanny soon married to one of the citizens there and although she never left the state, she did not turn from the Church nor from her friendship for the Prophet while she lived.

## SUNDRY EXPERIENCES OF BENJAMIN F. JOHNSON — HIS 2 1/2 YEAR MISSION — AND HIS CALLING AS THE PROPHET'S LEGAL AGENT

And now looking back through the stirring adventures and incidents of thrilling experience of the four years that followed from 1838 to 1843 — such as accompanying the "Kirtland Poor Camp", and arriving in Missouri just in time to take in all the experience of that period — such as imprisonment in Wilson's Camp, with (for many days) the Haun's Mill and McBride murderers as my guards — my wonderful escape and preservation and my return the fol-

lowing summer to meet the Prophet at Nauvoo — with the terrible sickness that followed, both with others and myself — after which a two and half year's mission to Canada and middle states — all so full of change and thrilling incident that all past experience of my life seemed as partly swallowed up or forgotten. But on meeting the Prophet at my return to Nauvoo in June [of 18]42, he greeted me with great warmth and almost at once installed me as *his Legal Agent,* with *the right to use his name as I might be led in business transactions,* especially as related to the Church lands and town property of Ramus, all of which were placed in my charge.

## The Prophet Teaches Benjamin F. Johnson Celestial Marriage and Asks for His Sisters as Plural Wives

And now in visiting my sister, the widow of Lyman R. Shirman, who died a martyr to the conditions at Far West, I found with her a former acquaintance, Sister Louisa Beaman, and I saw from appearances that they were both in his [i.e. the Prophet's] care and that he provided for their comfort. And as I was held closely to business, and my home at Ramus was 20 miles distant, I saw but little of them, until after the Prophet in early spring of [18]43 had come to Ramus to teach me Plural Marriage and to ask my other sisters to be his wives — an account of which I have heretofore given by sworn statement, but [I] will here repeat [it] as it occurred.

It was Sunday morning, April 3rd or 4th, 1843, that the Prophet was at my home in Ramus, and after breakfast he proposed a stroll together, and taking his arm our walk led towards a swail surrounded by trees and tall brush and near the forest line not far from my house. Through the swail ran a small spring brook across which a tree was fallen and was clean of its bark. On this we sat down and the Prophet proceeded at once to open to me the subject of Plural and Eternal Marriage. And he said that years ago in Kirtland the Lord had revealed to him the *Ancient Order of Plural Marriage* and the necessity for its practice and did command him then to take another wife and that among his first thoughts was to come to my mother for some of her daughters. And as he was again required

of the Lord to take more wives he had come now to ask me for my sister, Almira.

His words astonished me and almost took my breath. I sat for a time amazed and finally almost ready to burst with emotion, I looked him straight in the face and said, "Brother Joseph, this is something I did not expect and I do not understand it — you know whether it is right, I do not. I want to do just as you tell me and I will try, but if I ever should know that you do this to dishonor and debauch my sister I will kill you as sure as the Lord lives." And while his eye did not move from mine, he said with a smile and in a soft tone, "But Benjamin, you will never know that. But you will know the Principle is true and will greatly rejoice in what it will bring to you." "But how", I asked, "can I teach my sister what I myself do not understand, or show her what I do not myself see?" "But you will see and understand it", he said, "and when you open your mouth to talk to your sister, light will come to you and your mouth will be full, and your tongue loose. And I will today preach a sermon[ay] to you that no one but you will understand." Both of these promises were more than fulfilled — the text for his sermon was our use of the "one, five, and ten talents"[az] and as God had now commanded Plural Marriage and as Exaltation and Dominion of the Saints depended upon the number of their righteous posterity — from him who was found but with the one talent, it would be taken and given to him that had ten — which item of doctrine seems now to be somewhat differently construed, but my thought and wish is to write of things just as they occurred.

And I now bear an earnest testimony that his other prediction was more than fulfilled, for when with great hesitation and stammering I called my sister to a private audience and stood before her shaking with fear, just so soon as I found power to open my mouth it was filled, for the light of the Lord shone upon my understanding and the subject that had seemed so dark, now appeared of all subjects pertaining to our Gospel the most lucid and plain.

And so both my sister and myself were converted together, and ~~never again~~ did I need evidence or argument to sustain that high

[ax] *HC* 6:461–462; *TPJS* 368–369

and holy principle. And within a few days of this period my sister accompanied me to Nauvoo, where at our sister, Delcena's, we soon met the Prophet with his brother Hyrum and William Clayton as his private secretary, who always accompanied him.

Brother Hyrum at once took me in hand apparently in fear I was not fully converted and this was the manner of his talk to me: "Now Benjamin you must not be afraid of this new doctrine for it is all right. You know Brother Hyrum don't get carried away by worldly things, and *he fought the principle until the Lord showed him it was true*. I know that Joseph was commanded to take more wives and he waited until an *angel with a drawn sword*[az†] stood before him and declared that if he longer delayed fulfilling that command he would slay him." This was the manner of Brother Hyrum's teaching to me, which I then did not need, as I was fully converted.

Meanwhile the Prophet with Louisa Beaman and my sister, Delcena, had it agreeably arranged with [my] sister Almira and after a little instruction, she stood by the Prophet's side and was sealed to him as a wife by Brother Clayton, after which the Prophet asked me to take my sister to occupy Room No. 10 in his Mansion home during her stay in the city. But as I could not long be absent from my home and business, we soon returned to Ramus, where on the 15th of May some three weeks later the Prophet again came and at my house occupied the same room and bed with my sister that the month previous he had occupied with the daughter of the late Bishop Patridge as his wife. And at this time he sealed to me my first wife for eternity, and gave to me my first plural wife, Mary Ann Hale, an orphan girl raised by my mother, then living with us, who is still with me and is probably the only wife still living with the man to whom she was given by the Prophet.

At the marriage of sister Almira to the Prophet, there was still our *youngest sister,* for whom he manifested partiality and would gladly have married also, but she being young and partially promised to my first wife's brother, *although reluctantly,* the matter by him was dropped.

## The Practice of Plural Marriage

[ay] *WJS* 173, 269; *HC* 5:325–326 [az] Matt. 25:14–30

On learning from the Prophet that even in Kirtland "the Lord had required him to take plural wives, and that he had then thought to ask for some of my sisters," the past with its conditions and influences began more fully to unfold to my mind the causes that must at least in part have led to the great apostasy and disruption in Kirtland. Without doubt in my mind *Fanny Alger* was at Kirtland the *Prophet's first plural wife,* in which by right of his calling he was justified of the Lord (see Doctrine & Covenants Section 132:59–60), while Oliver Cowdery, Jared Carter, Warren Parish or others were not justified of the Lord, either in their criticisms upon the doings of the Prophet or in their becoming a "law unto themselves" through which they lost the light of there callings and were left in darkness.

Fanny Alger, when asked by her brother and others, even after the Prophet's death regarding her relation to him replied, "That is all a matter of my own, and I have nothing to communicate." Her parents died in Utah, true to the Church, and her brother John who resided in and died in southern Utah, to my knowledge was by President Kimball in the Temple at St. George, introduced as "brother of the Prophet Joseph's first plural wife."

The marriage of my eldest sister to the Prophet was before my return to Nauvoo, and being tacitly admitted, I asked no questions — and as to the number that came into the plural order before the Prophet's death, I can think of but few, whose names I will not now attempt to recall. But the number, soon after his death, began to increase. But on the finishing of the Temple with endowments that followed, the number was greatly augmented. And so there was at least a "few" who had "accepted" and practiced Plural Marriage from about 1842 to 1852, when the revelation was published to the world.

"How generally was polygamy practiced in Utah" is a question I am not qualified to answer. But from my narrow observation, I would "guess" that one tenth of our church men married plurally and that two thirds of that number made a fair success in raising good families, and that the other third was more or less a failure. But my judgment is not to be fully relied upon. Of the number of

plural marriages in Joseph's day, I have already said — of men there was but few comprising the Prophet and part of the Twelve with a few others who were his confidential or "bosom friends".

You ask if Plural Marriage was ever mandatory? *If you mean by the Lord, then I say yes,* for it was by command to the Prophet from the first, but from the Prophets to the people it came as counsel, which when personally given was not always heeded. But *no one who lived worthy of his Priesthood and calling was deprived of a right to Plural Marriage*. And just as it was a "happy privilege" for us in poverty and self sacrifice to leave our homes to preach the Gospel or to fill any calling in labors of love and charity for the salvation of the Father's children, thereby to earn their gratitude and love as our reward, just so to us it was a privilege, for do we attain to real happiness but in ministering happiness to others?

The first command was to "multiply"[ba] and the Prophet taught us that *dominion and power in the great future would be commensurate with the number of "wives, children and friends" that we inherit here* and that our great mission to Earth was to organize a nuclei of Heaven to take with us, to the increase of which there would be no end. And while I can believe that to some plural marriage was a great cross, yet I cannot say so from my own experience. For although in times that tried men's hearts, I married seven wives, I was blessed with the gift to love them all, and although providing for so many was attended with great labor, care and anxiety, yet there was sympathy and love as my reward and there is not one of my children or their mothers that are not dearer to me still than life.

On my return in 1855 from a mission to the Sandwich Isles, I found that Santaquin, with the homes of my family and all that I possessed, to [the] amount of thousands, was destroyed or stolen by Indians in the Walker War and my family homeless. And yet in [18]56, although conditions appeared forbidding, *counsel suggested that I take other wives*. And feeling sure it was the voice of the Lord to me, with [the] promise of His blessing, so I married three more young wives, which was followed by cricket and locus raids to destroy nearly all our crops for five years. And yet we were

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[azŕ] Joshua 5:13–14

neither hungry or naked. These were days that tried the souls of both men and women, and yet the love and gratitude of any one of my children today more than repays all. And I know that both men and women in Plural Marriage were happy in the assurance that they were obeying the command of God and the counsel of His servants. And without the consent and approbation of him who held the Keys of that Priesthood, no one had the right even to speak upon the subject of Plural Marriage to the woman he would marry. And even then he ought first to obtain consent of her parents, before having the right to speak to her upon the subject and this was ever the Law, so far as I understood it. And for all plural marriages or sealings, *there was the one only that held this right,*[ba†] which he, if necessary, could delegate to others.

And then with regard to a man's right to take a second wife without the knowledge or consent of the first, I will only say if his first wife be like the Sarah[bb] of old there would be no such necessity, but if otherwise then see Doctrine & Covenants, Section 132:64–65.

## THE EARLY PERSECUTION OF THE SAINTS

And now your question as to the cause of [the] early persecutions of the Saints — to answer this question we should go back to its inception to find cause for the hate that is ever behind to incite persecution. Between the present and former dispensations there is a striking analogy. Jesus appeared to the learned, haughty, dignified and opulent Jews as the "Poor, Illiterate 'Carpenter's Son of Nazareth'[bc] — a despised 'Galilean'"[bd] who claimed to be the "Son of the Highest,"[be] the great Jehovah [and] that "without him there was nothing made that was made"[bf] — that he held "all power, both in Heaven and on Earth"[bg] — that he could "destroy the Temple and rear it up in three days"[bh] etc. etc. While [at] the [same time the] multitude turned from them [i.e. the Pharasies and etc.] to follow him, the "low Nazarene".[bi] Hence their envy and jealousy which ripened into hate, and in their nailing him as a malefactor to the cross.

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[ba]Gen. 1:28; 9:1; D&C 132:30–34
[ba†]D&C 132:7 [bb]Gen. 16:1–3 [bc]Matt. 13:54–58; John 1:45–46 [bd]Matt. 21:11; Mark 1:9 [be]Luke 1:32, 35 [bf]John 1:3; 1 Cor.

And just so it has been in our own day — Joseph Smith of lowly birth, a farm boy of the common class — poor, illiterate and without distinction, other than being religiously inclined. He attended revivals — [he] was in their anxious circles, honestly seeking religion, and to learn which was the right church. And calling upon the Lord in simple faith that he might know [the truth], both the Father and the Son in a pillar of light descended, and in teaching him, commanded that he "join no religious sect as their creeds were all an abomination in His sight."[bj] And this blow by an ignorant son of poverty at 14 years of age, in the face of all Christendom — an insult to the dignity of all priestly learning, greatness and wealth, with all their millions in Bible, missionary and other societies for converting the world — all their greatness defied and denounced by an ignorant boy. Their contempt led to hatred and persecution.

And when that same boy became a man, he claimed having revelations and that an angel had delivered to him golden plates containing the history of a fallen people, and that "God, through him, was about to restore the ancient Gospel in its purity",[bk] which if true, would blot out all their greatness. And so inspired by hate, they made lies their weapons, with which [they proceded] to fight the Truth, both of which are attributes of the Devil, whose servants they were as "blind leaders of the blind."[bl] The leaders [were] blinded by envy, jealousy, self interest and hate, while the multitude were blinded by the popular prejudice and cry of "away with them"[bm] and all going together to the pit, just as the Master saw.[bn] And upon the cross [he] prayed [for] his Father to forgive them as they "knew not what they did."[bo]

Our Prophet Joseph, like the Master, was held in contempt by learned priests, bigots and hypocrites, and like him was scorned, despised, and derided by the rich, and by all Christendom. [He] was hated without cause and persecuted unto death by those who would not know him. It is true that the Prophet seemed to lay the foundation of our Church with a military spirit and so, unlike the present, he taught us resistance to all oppression [and] to defend our liberties with the "sword". But I can now see [that] the Temple

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8:6; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2 [bg]Matt. 28:18 [bh]Matt. 26:61; Mark 14:58; John 2:19–20
[bi]John 1:46 [bj]JSH 1:19 [bk]JSH 1:33–35 [bl]Matt. 15:14; Luke 6:39 [bm]Luke 23:18; John 19:15 [bn]Matt. 15:14; Luke 6:39

of Truth and Love is built higher by the Master['s] hand, and that resentment brought to us only calamity and the reverse of our hopes. And I can also now see that through the ignorance or arrogance of some who were then with us, that unnecessary offenses were at times given to strengthen the prejudice or hate of our enemies. For that was the infancy of the Church, and it's day of childlike enthusiasm and great hopes. And at times, no doubt, leading Elders made childish boasts to irritate our enemies, but of that period and experience as compared with today you can realize but little. And so I do not marvel at your criticisms upon the common manner of disposing of the question of "causes", for all is now so changed.

And as since before 1830, the Lord began (through the Prophet Joseph) to turn the Keys of Knowledge — to flood the world with new Light and Life, or to plant in the "three measures of meal" that "leaven,"[bp] [and] through which all the world will yet become leavened — [and] which [Truth and Light] has, since its inception, been working in the world's thought to produce great changes politically, religously, socially, financially and scientifically. [This is the result of] the increased Light that came to Earth through the Keys of Knowledge [which were] turned by the Prophet Joseph, [and] for which he was derided, hated and killed, but towards which all searching eyes of inquiry are now turning, with new thoughts leading towards the great truths of the Gospel — while many principles of our religion are being counterfeited by the world, to throw dust in the eyes of the thoughtless, that they may not discover that this is the great day of "God's preparation"[bq] for regenerating the Earth with a Zion for its capital city.

## THE PROPHET AND HIS HOBBIES

The Prophet fully realized that arrayed against him or the Truth was combined all the religious, political, financial, educational and social power of the world. And all this power he had to meet with wisdom that came alone from God. He had no time or place for "Hobbies", but stood boldly to defend the Truth with such weapons and helps

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[bo] Luke 23:34

as came to him of the Lord. Parley P. Pratt, through his *"Voice of Warning to All People"*, [which was] published at an early day in Kirtland, was a primary exponent of the Prophet's theology. And the Prophet's reply to journalists, who early in Nauvoo asked him for a copy of the "Mormon Creed", has since become our "Articles of Faith".[br] And if the Prophet did have a "hobby", it was to provide for the poor, and to defend the liberties of his people — for which [cause] he organized the Nauvoo Legion, and for which he laid down his life. And the principle of his government or influence over his people is explained in his reply to a church dignitary (I think a Catholic bishop) who at the Nauvoo Mansion asked him "by what power he governed so great a people?" He replied, "I do not govern them — I teach them correct principles and they govern themselves",[bs] which was a "hobby", if he had any.

## THE PROPHET'S TEACHING OF LOVE — THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD — THE PROCREATION OF SPIRITS

The Prophet's teaching of "Love" was not to work upon the sympathies and sensibilities of the people, but by his great example in self sacrifice and in showing us that while all the world was against us, our only hope was in our *union,* and that union was only possible as *the fruit of our love for each other.* And in teaching us the *"Fatherhood of God* and *Brotherhood of Man,"* we could begin to see why we should "love God supremely, and our brother as ourselves."[bt] He taught us that *God was the great head of human procreation* — [that He] was really and truly the Father of *both our Spirits and our Bodies* — that we were but *parts of a great whole,* mutually and equally dependant upon each other according to conditions. And in our love of God, we show as do the members of our bodies naturally, *a greater love and protection for our head*. But this reasoning could not be fully understood by all, and as I have said before, in the infancy of the Church our minds and views were more narrow and we were more petulent, resentful

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[bp]Matt. 13:33; Luke 13:20–21; *HC* 5:207 [bq]PGP p. 61, Articles of Faith 10; D&C 113:7–8; 78:11–15; 95:4

and perhaps more vindictive than now.

[Now] that the principles of charity and love are seen to be the life spring and core principle of our Gospel, and now that we see the "Temple of Charity, Union and Love" reared above its foundation, once guarded by the "Nauvoo Legion", commanded by the traitor, "Joab, General in Israel", we are led to feel that those were the days of childhood's mistakes. Yet all leading to great purposes, as was the call of Judas to the Apostleship. And we are, as a people today, in wisdom, stature and power with God, just what we have grown to be through a cumulative experience in the Father's care.

### EARLY DAY MARRIAGES AMONG THE SAINTS

Replying to your questions relating to early day marriages in the Church — I will say that there was no arbitrary rule relating to marriage other than that the ceremony be in strict accordance with statute law of the state. And as no one of the Elders at a very early day took to themselves the right to perform that ceremony, it was left to the justice of the peace, until Elder Seymore Brunson at Kirtland assumed that perogative and was patronized until others followed his example. And I remember of no marriage by the Prophet until at Nauvoo. And [as] for marrying with the outside [world], the rule from the first was, as now, strongly against it by counsel, but tolerant as to common fellowship — while all the wise understand that such marriage is of no eternal worth.

### THE EARLY CHURCH ATTITUDE TOWARDS OTHER DENOMINATIONS

In reply to your question on early proselyting and [the] attitude of the Church towards other denominations — I must say again that in the rise of the Church all advantages of wealth, education and popularity were with our enemies. While the few poor, unlearned Elders [who were] called of the Lord, were at every disadvantage, but in having the Truth, and a trust in the Lord. And they at times through their faith and zeal, enthused by the spirit of their callings, were led to use the Gospel Truths as a battering ram to demolish

creeds and hypocrisy as fabrics "built upon the sand"[bu] instead of first rearing in view of all the Gospel Temple of Truth and Love, as a home of refuge for the honest in heart, when their houses [which were] "built upon the sand should fall". And our labors then were perhaps not always in the wisdom and charity that the experience and learning of subsequent years has brought. And in proportion as we were derided, persecuted and held in contempt by a hireling priesthood, whose creeds we knew were but an "abomination"[bv] and all their ministry but fraud — and so we regarded their show of sincerity as hollow mockery and pretense, all for popularity or gain. And of all the sects we regarded the Catholic Church as the great head of priestcraft and hypocrisy. And so far as I am personally concerned, I am hardly rid of that view and feeling yet — that they are really but "garnished sepulchres"[bw] filled with the bones of a dead and rotten past.

And right here a full chapter could be written of young men, who while yet but boys, went forth in ignorance and through their humility, in the spirit of their callings, soon became mighty, both in word and in deed. And for a season [they] would be as brilliant stars of our hopes, but through forgetting the Lord, in rememberance of their own greatness, too many like bright meteors sank from sight to rise no more, in fulfillment of His word that "no flesh should glory in His presence"[bx] — while others trusting in their own strength, were led into sins and were swallowed up in their transgressions after a labor in faithfulness for a season.

## PIONEERS AND OREGON

With others, from the Prophet, at an early day, I took in the idea of our pioneering or exploring to find somewhere in the west a place of safety for the Church. And while some thoughts would be of valleys in the mountains, as [an] oasis in the "Great American Desert", others did talk of Oregon. But not in the Prophet's day did any properly organized company start. But at his death, the star of our hope for a home of peace began more plainly to rise

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[br]PGP p. 60–61, Articles of Faith [bs]*JD* 10:190; 14:162; 13:244 [bt]Matt. 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31, 33; Luke 10:27–37

in the great west, somewhere to be found, but where we knew not. Among the speculations as to where, Oregon was talked of, and then of Vancouver Island, which with its great advantages for Mormon safety from persecution, was pointed out by our professed friend, Stephen A. Douglas, who came to the "Nauvoo Mansion" in [18]45, then kept open by myself, soon after which the praises of "Upper California" began to be rehearsed and sung. But by Brigham Young to my knowledge, there was never a pointer given as to our destination as a people. And although in organizing the pioneer emigration, I was appointed Captain of 50 wagons and was among the first to cross the Mississippi and camp on Sugar Creek, I yet heard no suggestion by our leader as to where we were going. Nor did I know of a "scout, mountaineer or guide" being in our camp for one day, or for any one to give a word to point or direct our way but Brigham Young. And never until after our [company] arrived in Salt Lake Valley did I see Fremont, Kit Carson, Peg Leg Smith, or Capt. Bridger — all of whom I saw after our modern Moses, guided alone by revelation, had led us to Salt Lake Valley.

## CHANGES AND MISTAKES IN THE CHURCH

Of changes and mistakes I hardly feel inspired to write, for change is everywhere and in everything, and liability of change and mistake is with everyone, and if the master "learned obedience"[by] through experience, how much more need of experience have we? I believe that the mistakes of a true man will be as steps upon which he will rise to greater wisdom, exertion and to broader views, and why should not the experience of yesterdays make us the wiser today? We are not always in the same mood or condition. Neither was the Master always in [the] same mind and feeling, for when prompted by hunger he cursed the tree that bore him no fruit.[bz] And when angry, with scourges he drove from the temple "money changers" and kicked over their tables.[ca] But this was not his mood when at the grave of Lazarus he so wept that the guests exclaimed "Behold how he loveth him"[cb] — nor [was it his mood] when in view of calamities to come, he wept over Jerusalem.[cc] And does it not

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[bu]Matt. 7:26–27 [bv]JSH 1:19 [bw]Matt. 23:27, 29 [bx]1 Cor. 1:29

look like a mistake that he chose as one of his Apostles a Judas to betray him?[cd]

And now all of this to a great degree finds a parallel in the life of the Prophet Joseph. He was always ready to fight for the rights and liberties of his friends and his heart was ever full of sympathy and tears to sorrow with those he loved. And he too chose among his councillors and friends those who did betray and bring him to death. And no man, seemingly, could make greater mistake[s] in selection of associates than did the Prophet. And this with the many other things of which he was accused, his enemies held as evidence that he was a fallen prophet. And even the Lord not only at times admonished him for neglect of duty, but speaks of his "sins" and "transgressions,"[ce] which would imply that he was not always equally enlightened and guided by inspiration. And in the earliest days he did so make mistakes that the Lord at one time withheld from him the keys of his calling.[cf] And he does not in his own history hesitate to say that after conversing with both the Father and the Son[cg] and being ministered to by Holy Angels,[ch] that he yet made great mistakes and was overcome in transgression and sins.[ci] And as to mistakes, through want of properly discerning the "times and seasons"[ci†] of prophetic events, we were, over seventy years ago, taught by our leaders to believe that the coming of Christ and [the] Millennial Reign was much nearer then, than we believe it to be now. And mistakes through imagination and groundless hopes, have been all along the line of our experience as a church. And are not our reverses, disappointments and mistakes permitted to be as monitors and guides for the future? And I do know of things done and of principles taught by the Prophet Joseph that our Prophet Joseph F. [Smith] would not today accept as an example for him to imitate. And is not our growth in wisdom the cumulated fruit of our experimental or active life?

## CONCERNING BRIGHAM YOUNG AND HIS TRANSFIGURATION

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[by]Heb. 5:8 [bz]Matt. 21:19, 20; Mark 11:20–21 [ca]Matt. 21:12; Mark 11:15; John 2:13–16
[cb]John 11:36 [cc]Luke 19:41–44 [cd]Matt. 10:4; Mark 3:19; Luke 6:13, 16; John 6:70–71 [ce]JSH 1:28–29; D&C 5:21–22, 35; 10:1–3; 20:5–6; 35:18; 64:5; 93:47; 132:56, 60; 90:1–4 [cf]D&C 6:28; 10:1–2 [cg]JSH 1:17 [ch]D&C 27:5–13; 128:20–21 [ci]JSH

Of Brigham Young as President of the Church — I will again bear this as a faithful testimony, that I do know and bear record, that upon the head of Brigham Young as Chief with the Apostleship in full, was by the voice of the Prophet Joseph in my hearing laid the full responsibility of bearing off the Kingdom of God to all the world.

And I do further bear this as a testimony faithful and true, to the Church and to all the world — that at a conference of the whole Church at Nauvoo, subsequent to the Prophet's death and return of the absent Apostles — that I sat in the assembly near to President Rigdon, closely attentive to his appeal to the conference, to recognize and sustain his claim as "Guardian for the Church". And I was perhaps to a degree forgetful of what I knew to be the rights and duties of the Apostleship. And as he closed his address and sat down my back was partly turned to the seat occupied by Apostle Brigham Young and other Apostles — when suddenly and as from Heaven, I heard the voice of the Prophet Joseph that thrilled my whole being. And quickly turning around, *I saw in the transfiguration of Brigham Young the tall, straight and portly form of the Prophet Joseph Smith, clothed in a sheen of light, covering him to his feet*. And I heard the real and perfect voice of the Prophet even to the whistle, as in years past caused by the loss of a tooth, said to have been broken out by the mob at Hiram [Ohio]. This veiw or vision although but for seconds, was to me as vivid and real as the glare of lightning or the voice of thunder from the heavens. And so deeply was I impressed with what I saw and heard in this transfiguration, that for years I dare not publicly tell what was given me of the Lord to see. But when in later years I did publicly bear this testimony, I found that others could testify to having seen and heard the same. But to what proportion of the congregation who were present, I could never know, but I do know that this my testimony is true.

The Prophet's lost tooth, to which I alluded, was (as generally understood) broken out by the mob at Hiram [Ohio] while trying to pry open his mouth to strangle him with acid[cj] — from which time, until a tooth was replaced by [a] dentist neighbor a year or

so previous to his death, there had [been] a whistle-like sound to acompany all his public speaking, which I again plainly heard at the time of which I write.

And while I do know that Brigham Young as President of the Church was the right man in the right place and a great leader for Israel, I still know that he never claimed to be perfect in all of his ways, but that like his brethren, he at times was liable to mistakes. And to some of his mistakes I am a witness, and also that he saw some of his mistakes and nobly corrected them. And to show more fully his leading traits and general "personal character," I will go back to relate that soon after embracing the Gospel in 1832, Brigham Young started with his brother from their home in the state of New York to visit the Prophet at Kirtland and on their way [they] called upon us at Pomfret, New York, who had received the Gospel just before them. And remaining over night with my sister's husband Lyman R. Shirman, and while at evening in animated conversation upon the gifts as promised to accompany the Gospel, the spirit came upon Brother Shirman in mighty power and he opened his mouth in an unknown tongue, to the great surprise and joy of all. And I think that Brother Brigham also at that time received the Gift — Brother Lyman R. Shirman being the first known to have spoken in the Gift of Tongues by the power of God in this dispensation. And on Brother Brigham arriving in Kirtland at the Prophet's home, being called to lead in family prayer, as a surprise even to the Prophet, he opened his mouth in a strange tongue, the first heard by him, which he said at once was the language of our first parents.[ck] And he at that time made the prediction upon the head of Brigham Young, that "at some period he would become the leader of the Church, and that there would be but one danger to beset him, and that would be his love of wealth." These things were told me by Brother Shirman at near the time of their occurence, who remained almost as the right hand of the Prophet until the day of his death.

And while I am witness that after the Prophet's death, that Brigham Young became Israel's great leader, a Prophet, Seer, and Revelator to the Church in all the world, I yet know that he was a great financier and at times did manifest a love for wealth and ~~did make mis~~takes, some of which he may not have lived fully to

1:28–29 [ci†]1 Thes. 5:1–2; Acts 1:7; Dan. 2:21; D&C 88:42–44; 121:12; Abraham 3:4

rectify. But with all of his mistakes, private or public, his voice was ever the voice of the True Shepherd[cl] to Israel. And in looking for mistakes, I feel admonished to look after my own personality, which with all of his faults, might perhaps leave me in comparison, too small for a full claim to notice.

From his young manhood, all through his after-life, in close observation I saw him, through every calling, rise to become Israel's great chief, holding every Key of Priesthood and Power pertaining to the Kingdom of God on the Earth, and of Salvation for the Dead. And I saw too, that through his great capacity as financier, with his love of riches, that he became as the Prophet had foretold, possessed of great wealth — which although it may have had an influence to a degree upon his children, it had none to draw him from the love or duties of his high calling, in which at times he seemed fully tested. And the confidence of the people was towards him, from his first assuming the Presidency.

His great influence as a leader seemed to lie in his quick discernment, his ready decisions and in his ripe judgement, in placing men and things in their proper position and to their best possible use. While his intuitive magnetism, his kindly sympathy in affliction, his noble bearing as a brother, friend and as a man in its true and full sense, inspired confidence, respect and love in all who really knew him. And as for comparing him with others filling the same calling, I can only think of them all and each as strong and mighty pillars in the great temple of our hopes, equal in strength and use, but each molded by the Master[']s] hand in symmetry and beauty to a difference in form and mind but not in Priesthood and purpose.

BRIGHAM YOUNG
— HIS INTEREST IN EDUCATION, MUSIC AND DRAMA —

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[cj]*HC* 1:263 [ck]*HC* 1:296–297

Upon this question I will not prolong remarks — with Brigham Young from 1832, until his death in 1877, I was often closely associated and I know him to have been a pioneer, a promoter and a true friend to education. And although he was not himself cultured in scholarship or refined by classic education, yet he by nature was highly cultured and refined, both in habit, demeanor, and conversation. And no one could associate with him and not be impressed by his refining influence. And so far as the influence of music and the drama tend to civilize, elevate or refine society, credit should be due to Brigham Young as the pioneer chief in their promotion and establishment in the heart of the "Great American Desert", to give musical tone and inspiration to all its divisions into states.

But we should not forget that Brigham Young was the leader of a people [who were] driven before the cannon and bayonet of a heartless and cruel mob [and] who fled across the Mississippi in winter, leaving their homes without opportunity to provide food or clothing, and plundered of all they could not carry, and to go they knew not where. And to save the lives of all of these many thousand[s] now devolved upon Brigham Young — even to look after the possibilities for transportation, to learn the way, to open roads, to see that all had food and then protect them from the tomahawk, scalping knife, and bullet — and when in the valleys, to measure out lands, to formulate laws, and to council the people how to save a pittance from swarms of crickets and locusts that ravaged their fields. And for some years President Young, with all the people, was devotedly seeking to save the souls of the people alive from starvation, with hope of a better day for education. But enthused by the spirit of our leader in every way station on the road, in every town or ward settled after arriving in Utah, about the first house built by the people was for a public school and meeting purposes. And [the idea] that Brigham Young opposed education with [a] desire to keep his people in ignorance is a monster in falsehood, for he was not only the pioneer of education to the mountain states, but so long as he lived he assisted it liberally with his means. And the Brigham Young Academy and College in Utah will continue to bear fruit to the honor of his name after his traducers with their falsehoods are buried in forgetfulness under the contempt of God

and all just men.

## THE MORMON BATTALION

What I know of the object and purpose in raising the "Mormon Batallion?" To show you that I did know the motive of President Young in sending the battalion, I will say, that as one of that special Council [i.e. the Council of Fifty] organized by the Prophet, of which I have written and of which President Young became the head, I still held my seat and [still] had a voice in all general movements pertaining to our exodus as a people from Nauvoo. And I will say that this Council, as a legislature of the people, did continue under the Presidency, and became the Colonial Council or Legislature of the State of Deseret. And I was present at the arrival of Colonel Little and company at Garden Grove with a requisition by count of 500 volunteers for the American Army, sprung upon the Mormons as a test of their loyalty and patriotism by Senator Burton of Missouri. It was well understood at the time, as the subject was fully ventilated by the Council, and all comprehended it as a great sacrifice, and that there was no reward or benefit offered by the government in any degree. It was a test of the people's and our Prophet's loyalty and patriotism while under arrest, and this patriotism and loyalty was now to be placed upon the altar at a great disadvantage. And would we stand the test even as did our father Abraham,[cm] answer this great question? At Garden Grove all of the enlistment was filled; and now this was unequalled patriotism and valor of the Sons of Zion, who sacrificed aged parents, wives and children, sweethearts and other dear ones, by leaving them homeless, unprotected, and to the mercy of the wild and naked plains.

That such a privilege was sought for by the Mormons should be stamped as a monstrosity in falsehood. But that it was a great and far reaching test of loyalty, all will admit, which was to establish the truth of Mormon love and loyalty to that Heaven-inspired and God-given Constitution of the United States, which will yet give guarantee of liberty and equal rights to all the people of the Earth;

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[cl] Jer. 31:1; 34:23; John 10:1–14

and nations shall "learn war no more,"[cn] and shall learn to better comprehend that great principle of the "Fatherhood of God, and the Brotherhood of man."[co]
I do not think of more to write.

*B[enjamin] F. Johnson*

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[cm]Gen. 22:1–18